

Message

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Subject: FW: MLive: Trump administration won't set legal limit for PFAS in drinking water, report says

MLive

Trump administration won't set legal limit for PFAS in drinking water, report says

<https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2019/01/trump-administration-wont-set-legal-limit-for-pfas-in-drinking-water-report-says.html>

By Paula Gardner, Updated 10:42 AM; Posted Jan 28, 9:08 PM

As Michigan's PFAS testing showed contamination across the state in 2018, one theme remained a priority among legislators, officials and affected residents: The nation needs a limit for how much of the "forever chemicals" will be allowed in drinking water.

Yet despite the urging of the growing number of people concerned about PFAS, indications are emerging that the Environmental Protection Agency won't include a maximum contaminant level (MCL) for the chemicals in public water supplies as part of a soon-to-be-released national management plan.

"The chemicals will remain unregulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act, according to sources familiar with a still-unreleased draft plan that acting (EPA) administrator Andrew Wheeler signed off on in late December," according to a report published Jan. 28 in Politico.

The per- and poly-fluorinated chemicals have been used in products like Teflon, Scotchgard and AFFF firefighting foam, in addition to other industrial uses. They are linked to adverse health effects like cancer, developmental delays and endocrine disruption.

The national plan was promised in 2018 as the EPA organized public meetings to hear from communities grappling with the chemicals in the environment and drinking water supplies. Among them was Michigan, where Peter Grevatt, former director of the EPA's Ground and Drinking Water Division, heard numerous concerns from state officials and residents.

According to state data, more than 2 million Michigan residents have at least trace levels of PFAS in their drinking water. The city of Parchment water system shut down after high levels were found last summer. Across the U.S., an estimated 110 million Americans are drinking water containing PFAS, according to an analysis by the Environmental Working Group.

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'We wish them to take a more assertive role.'

While Michigan tested all public water supplies and launched a sweeping program to find other sources of PFAS, the EPA extended the deadline for its plan until year-end.

In the meantime, states have relied on the unenforceable federal health advisory level for two types of PFAS chemicals, PFOS and PFOA, in drinking water of 70 parts per trillion (ppt). Some have begun to set their own regulations.

In January, Michigan set a potable groundwater limit that mirrors the EPA level for PFOS and PFOA. In 2014, the state set a 12-ppt standard for PFOS in surface water.

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Michigan says it's leading the nation in PFAS response. What is stopping our state from doing what others already are?

Yet many in the state are calling for a lower legal limit for PFAS in Michigan drinking water. They include state Sen. Winnie Brinks, D-Grand Rapids, who re-introduced a bill earlier this month seeking a limit of 5-ppt.

The EPA advisory limit of 70-ppt "may not provide a sufficient margin of safety," said Dr. David Savitz, professor of epidemiology at Brown University and the chief scientific consultant for Michigan's PFAS initiative, as that panel released a report in December.

Other states are moving toward lower limits. On Monday, Vermont announced it is seeking a limit of 20-ppt for five types of PFAS: perfluooctanoic acid (PFOA), perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS), perfluorohexane sulfonic acid (PFHxS), perfluoroheptanoic acid (PFHpA) and perfluorononanoic acid (PFNA). Massachusetts also announced it will consider similar limits.

Wheeler told Congress during his confirmation hearings earlier this month that the EPA's plan was coming soon, but that he couldn't commit to setting a legal PFAS limit. According to the Politico report, the plan does include a decision to list PFOS and PFOA as hazardous under the Superfund law -- a move that would greatly impact contamination cleanups.

The EPA told Politico that it would not discuss the plan's contents until it is made public. The agency did not respond to an email from MLive.com on Monday.

"The action plan is currently undergoing interagency review," EPA spokesperson John Konkus told Politico.

Yet as Wheeler, a former coal industry lobbyist, hopes to be appointed EPA, a bipartisan group formed last week in Congress to push forward on PFAS concerns. That group follows several bills in both the House and Senate that would direct funding toward identification of contamination and cleanup, in addition to classifying the chemicals as toxic substances to allow federal Superfund cleanup funds.

And U.S. Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Flint, released a statement on January 29 saying that Congress could act if the EPA doesn't.

"The Trump Administration's failure to urgently address dangerous PFAS chemical contamination threatens public health," he said in a statement. "By refusing to set a drinking water standard for these dangerous chemicals, the EPA will limit the public's knowledge about PFAS in their drinking water and restrict clean-up of PFAS contamination. While the Trump Administration has claimed it wants to address PFAS, they have been all talk and no action. Even the Trump Administration's own studies have identified how dangerous PFAS chemicals are, yet they refuse to act.

"Since the Trump Administration refuses to act, Congress must protect public health by setting a national drinking water standard for these toxic chemicals."

Environmentalists still look to the EPA for their response.

“The most efficient and equitable way to remove these chemicals from the nation’s drinking water supply is to use the agency’s authority to set legal limits,” said David Andrews of the Environmental Working Group in a news release. “It’s a national problem, and it needs a national solution. Anything short of that is window dressing.”

The vote on Wheeler’s appointment is scheduled for February 5.

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